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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated a first-year pilot program to improve retention, academic achievement, and student satisfaction of 49 academically underprepared freshmen at Assumption College (Massachusetts), a predominantly white, Catholic, liberal arts institution. Students were identified by low verbal, math, and total SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) scores, and low high school rank in class. Cohort members were enrolled together in small groups in three required courses, and assigned to a faculty member with whom they met an hour a week, distinguishing the program from that in which other first-year students were enrolled. Retention rates and academic achievement were compared with those of 54 similar students identified the previous year. Students in both the experimental and comparison groups also completed a follow-up survey on the effectiveness of the program or on their first-year experiences and the value they placed on various first-year experiences. Results indicated that pilot program members had lower attrition rates and higher grade point averages after their first year than did control group students. Program students were more sociable with other students from their courses and spent more time with friends pursing a blend of social and academic interests, but were less involved in campus activities in general. The survey is attached. (Contains 32 references.) (DB)

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ED 426 680

Evaluation of a First -Year Pilot Program for Academically Underprepared Students at a Private Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

Retention programs often address specific institutional needs and thus vary depending on the institution. This research studied the effects of a first-year program on retention, academic achievement and student satisfaction with their college experience. Assumption College, a predominantly white, Catholic liberal arts institution, identified 101 academically underprepared first year students in the Falls of 1995 and 1996. The students in the 1996 cohort took part in a mentoring pilot program. The 1995 cohort did not. The traditional-aged participants of the study were identified by low verbal SAT scores, low math SAT scores, low total SAT scores, and low high school rank in class (lower quadrant of the class). The mentoring pilot program cohort members were enrolled together in three required courses. Their small section sizes and their assignment to a faculty mentor with whom they met an additional hour per week distinguished them from other first year students. Those remaining in the program, took two courses together in the Spring. Using institutional data, retention rates and academic achievement were calculated for both cohorts. Students at Assumption College in the Fall of 1997 from both cohorts received a follow-up survey of the effectiveness of the program (or their first year) and the value that participants placed on a variety of first year experiences.

The results indicated that Pilot Program members had a lower attrition rate and a higher GPA after their first year as compared with the control group. They were more sociable with other students from their courses. They spent more time with their friends pursuing a blend of social and academic interests, but were less involved in campus activities in general.

Introduction

Retention of students is a major concern of colleges and universities in the United States. According to Gass (1990), the concerns colleges and universities have about retention derive from lower numbers of applications for admission, the financial and personal losses often incurred by the institution when students do not complete their education, and the "efficiency of educational processes of the institution" (p. 33). It is an urgent matter that many colleges and universities have addressed by using early intervention programs to keep attrition numbers low.

Early intervention programs include orientation programs, designated freshmen courses, and academic support services (Seidman, 1996). Such programs assist students with their transition from high school into college, often addressing the academic and social aspects of college life (Davis, 1992; Gass, 1990; Seidman, 1996) and introducing students to campus organizations and activities (Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989). Gass' (1990) concern about intervention programs is that they do not address students' academic, social and personal needs and that these programs are at best a short-term remedy to the retention problem. However, most retention programs today are planned carefully to address specific student concerns (Gass, 1990).

The most crucial years for retention are the first and the second (Seidman, 1996). Tinto reports from the 1992 ACT Survey that attrition for students in four-year public institutions was 28.3 percent, while at four-year private institutions it was 24.0 percent (Seidman,1996).

Gass (1990) notes six factors that, when used in combination, help to increase retention. They are: "positive peer-group development, positive interaction with faculty members, development of career and/or major course of study plans, strong interest in academics, adequate preparation for college academics and compatibility

with student expectations and college offerings" (p. 33). Similarly, Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) list factors that they believe contribute to low attrition. They are: "assessing personal strengths and setting goals, time management, reviewing study skills including memory development, reading, note taking, and test preparation, utilizing communication skills in handling interpersonal relationships, and finding and utilizing resources both on and off campus" (p. 445). Most or a combination of these factors are used in designing successful retention programs.

Many research studies have been conducted to determine if intervention programs make a difference in the retention rates on the academic, social and participation in campus organizations and activities. Most of the research, however, appears to have been done on intervention programs of large public institutions with no mention of private institutions. Since the results of intervention programs cannot be generalized to small-private liberal arts institutions, the purpose of this study is to evaluate a first-year retention Pilot Program to determine whether it has a positive or negative effect on academic achievement, retention rate, and social adaptations of students at Assumption College.

Literature Review

Research in the field of student retention has been conducted over nearly forty years, beginning with Iffert (1958) who used data from the class entering college in 1950. Astin (1977, 1993) has been using the Cooperative Institute Research Program (CIRP) database since the 1970s. Most recently, the work of refining theory in the field has been done primarily by Tinto (1975, 1982, 1988, 1993). Seidman (1996) summarizes Tinto's model of retention/attrition as follows:

> [T]he theory posits that an individual's pre-entry college attributes (family background, skill and ability, prior schooling) form an individual's goals and commitments. The individual's goals and commitments interact over time with institutional experiences (both formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution). The extent to which the individual becomes academically and socially integrated into the formal and informal academic and social systems of an institution determines the individual's departure decision (p. 18).

Tinto (1988) advocated viewing student departure in three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. He derived this view from the field of social anthropology, paralleling the movement from one group association to another in tribal societies with the departure of a student from home toward incorporation as a member of the new college community.

The separation phase involves "parting from past habits and patterns of affiliation" (p. 443). Tinto acknowledged that this process is somewhat stressful and that "[i]n a very real sense, their staying in college depends on their becoming leavers from their former communities" (p. 443).

Once into the second stage of departure, students need to cope with the additional discomforts of having left what is familiar and having not yet become

familiar enough with the new norms and behaviors to identify with them. Tinto (1988) suggested that the "stress and sense of loss, if not desolation, that sometimes accompanies the transition to college can pose serious problems for the individual attempting to persist in college" (p. 444). It is not the tasks themselves that are so overwhelming in this stage, but more the associated stresses that precipitate student attrition. "It is the individual's response to those conditions that finally determines staying or leaving" (p. 445).

Traditionally, student service administrators have responded to their understanding of the transition stage by developing orientation programs. The content of various programs has ranged from an elaborate course registration experience to a week-long microcosm of campus activities. What has been lacking in these introductory experiences has been an academic component. Colleges began to extend their orientations into the first semester with a six week introduction to campus resources and study skills course such as Bryant College's "Avenues to Success in College" (Adam Whitlock, personal communication, October 1996) or the semester length University of South Carolina's University 101 (1997), which is designed to enhance the bonding of the cohort through regular small group discussion in a credit course format. Recognizing that there is a need to bridge the gap between learning where services can be obtained and making the personal connections with the people providing the services, institutions have also added staff and program offices to their student services structures.

The culminating stage of departure/attachment is incorporation. In this stage the student establishes competency as a member of the institution (its social and intellectual components of community). Following the lead of Astin's (1977, 1993) work, researchers have also concentrated on developing methods to assist students in becoming involved with their new institutions. According to Upcraft (1989), Astin's involvement theory posits the following:

1) Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various "objects." The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).

2) Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3) Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in, say, academic work can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (does the student review and comprehend reading assignments, or does the student simply stare at the textbook and daydream?)

4) The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5) The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (pp. 135-136).

Much research and programming have been directed toward increasing opportunities for student involvement with the social and intellectual communities of college life. Increased retention has been associated with informal student-faculty contact (Gerdes, 1994; Griffith, 1996; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980). According to Noel, et al. (1986): "Contact with faculty was the number one reason [students] had decided to stay for their sophomore year" (p. 384). Increased retention rates have been associated with the development of a mentor

relationship with faculty (Brookman, 1989; Griffith, 1996; Kluepfel, 1994; Levitz, 1989; Martin, 1993; Reyes, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Tinto, 1988). Institutions have intentionally combined their retention efforts with their academic advising (Levitz, 1989), advocating that the "most student-centered people, programs, and services...[be] front load[ed]" (p. 79), that is, implemented during the first year.

The Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) study is particularly focused on these areas. To investigate dimensions of social and academic integration, as well as goal and institutional commitment, they developed a 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement and administered it to 1,905 incoming freshmen at Syracuse University. There was a follow-up questionnaire mailed to the 1,457 respondents to the first instrument, which resulted in 773 usable responses. These respondents were matched with the Syracuse freshmen population for sex, racial/ethnic origin, college of enrollment, SAT scores, and freshman cumulative grade point average. Ninety students voluntarily withdrew at the end of their freshman year, whereas ten students were dismissed for unsatisfactory academic performance. The responses of the 90 (n_W) students who voluntarily withdrew were compared with the responses of those who persisted (n_P=673).

The results of a factor analysis yielded five factors: peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, students' perception of faculty concern for their development, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitments. These factors correctly identified 78.9% of the persisters and 75.8% of the dropouts. These results generally support the predictive validity of the major dimensions of the Tinto model.

Yet another approach has been advocated, that of using peer advisors (Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, 1989). A variation on the role of peers surfaces in the literature in the area of encouraging collaborative work among first year writing courses (Griffith, 1995, 1996). This feature of curriculum design not only brings a close association

with the writing faculty, but it also inspires peer community building (Griffith, 1995, 1996; Tinto, 1993).

The innovation of the freshman seminar has been an outgrowth of the desire to extend orientation, to ease the transition into the college way of life and into the particular college which sponsors it. Beyond offering a living student handbook of workshops and presentations by the student services personnel, the freshmen seminar offers students a learning environment that incorporates the ideas of outside of class student-faculty contact, smaller classes, and a cohort of students who are all taking the same courses. The focus of these seminars generally includes concentration on writing skills within a variety of academic disciplines. The administration of the institutions view the freshman seminar as a route toward increasing retention and academic success through increasing student satisfaction, by way of increasing student contact with faculty and with each other in an academic setting. Van Allen (1988) suggests: "A retention program must focus on and support the main objective of the students, which is almost always academic achievement" (p. 164). Pascarella (1980) found that, "significant positive associations exist between extent and quality of student-faculty informal contact and students' educational aspirations, their attitudes toward college, their academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and their institutional persistence" (p. 545).

A study by Johnson (1995) included 52 students enrolled in the First Year Alternative Experience program at the University of Southern Maine. The students were chosen for the program because they did not meet the academic criteria for acceptance into the university. They were admitted into the program on a conditional basis and were not permitted full acceptance into the university until specified conditions, such as satisfactory completion of English, mathematics, reading and other introductory college-level courses, had been met. Since these students would not normally even be at the institution, the study did not have a

control group with similar characteristics. Retention and academic achievement data were compiled following the fall and spring semesters. At the end of the fall and spring semesters, students were asked to complete a student satisfaction survey designed to determine how they spent their time each week, their perceptions of themselves as learners, their goals, and their perceptions of the university and the FYAE program.

This study used student retention rate, academic achievement, and satisfaction levels as indicators of the success of the FYAE program. Results indicated that the retention rate after the first year was 82 percent. Since there was no control group it was compared to the reported national retention rate of 66 percent. The mean GPA for the group was 2.61, however, there was no comparison or information given as to average GPA at the institution. The student satisfaction surveys provided information about the success of the program as it concerned the affective areas. Results indicated an increase in confidence and expectations and that students felt that support by the faculty contributed to their success. These findings agree with the literature that argues that faculty involvement and support is instrumental in first year retention (Tinto, 1975). The limitations of the study are based on the absence of a control group.

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) offer their understanding of the importance of the freshman seminar: "The freshman seminar is a proven and effective way of enhancing freshman success. It has been the glue that holds together and solidifies all efforts to enhance freshman academic and personal success" (p. 8).

The research questions which are examined in this study are: Does the Pilot Program at Assumption College follow the concepts found in the literature? Does the Pilot Program as a means of intervention with academically at risk students lead to the results of increased student satisfaction, enhanced academic success, and increased rates of retention?

Method

Sample

This study is a program evaluation where the target population is a group of 101 students identified as academically underprepared students at Assumption College. The sample was the population of all participants in the first year of the Pilot Program, matched with members of the previous year's entering class who would have met the same identifying program entry characteristics (had it been available to them). These characteristics are in order of consideration:

1) Low verbal SAT scores (below 407)
2) Low math SAT scores (below 418)
3) Low total SAT score (below 825)
4) Low high school rank in class (lower quadrant of class)

The sample consisted of 49 students (19 male, 30 female) from the Class of 2000 (the Pilot Program) and 54 students (27 female, 27 male) from the Class of 1999 (Control). All participants were traditional age, first-time college students. After the first semester of the Pilot Program, two students left the college. Forty-three of the remaining Pilot Program students chose to continue with the program through the second semester of their first year.

Treatment

The Assumption College First-year Pilot Program was created as an academic support program to increase retention rates and academic expectations of underprepared students. The program was initiated by faculty and administrators. Methods of raising academic standings for all students at the College and an honors program were among the ideas first suggested. In the summer of 1996 it was decided

that the College would focus on underprepared students entering Assumption College. A letter was sent by the Dean of the Undergraduate College in June, 1996 informing students that they were selected to participate in the experimental program.

The Pilot Program required students in the program to enroll in three designated three-credit courses: English Composition, Western Civilization and Introduction to Philosophy. The class size for the English Composition course was kept at 16-17. There were three sections of this course. There were two sections each of Western Civilization and Introduction to Philosophy, with class size ranging from 24-25 students. The reason for placing underprepared students in these high verbal and written requirement courses was to improve their verbal and writing skills. With the exception of the English Composition course, the class size was consistent with those of other courses at Assumption College.

In addition to the faculty advisor assigned to each student, Pilot Program students were also assigned a faculty mentor. The students were required to meet individually or in small groups with their mentor at least one hour a week. Three faculty mentors were selected from the faculty teaching the three required courses. Each mentor had 16-17 students and was required to focus on the students' development of verbal, study and note-taking skills.

Although the first semester's involvement in the Pilot Program was mandatory for the identified students, the spring semester was voluntary. There were two courses (Introduction to Literature and History of Western Civilization II -- or The Bible). There was no requirement for continuing the mentor relationship. Instead, the students added one hour of outside class contact with the Literature faculty per week. There is also an Academic Support Center at Assumption and the center hired an additional tutor for writing during the second semester. Use of the

Academic Support Center was voluntary during both semesters. Students took the normal load of five courses each semester.

Instrument

Two versions of a student opinion survey were designed for the Pilot Program group and control group. The surveys were similar, but differed in questions specifically about the Pilot Program. Along with a cover letter written by the researchers, Survey A was sent to 37 Pilot Program students and Survey B was sent 33 Control Group student (See Appendix A). The survey consisted of demographic information such as sex, housing, class year, major, ethnic background and religious affiliation. A four-point Likert-type scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" was used by students to rate their opinions about the academic, social and overall first-year experience at Assumption College. Open-ended questions were also asked to gather more specific information on students' first-year experience.

Because strict confidentiality was imperative, the researchers were unaware of the identities of the students, and a member of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies' staff served as an intermediary between the Dean's office (where the identities were known) and the research team (where the identities were unknown). The surveys were mailed to a total of 70 students on October 20, 1997 with a deadline of October 27, 1997. As an incentive to increase the response rate, a Halloween "goodie bag" was promised to all who returned their surveys personally to the drop-off office. To increase the rate of surveys returned, a second mailing was sent on October 30. The response rate is as follows: Among the retained Pilot Program students, 50% of the males and 61% of the females responded ($n_{pp}= 7_m, 14_f$), and among the Control group 19% of the males and 26% of the females responded ($n_c=4_m, 5_f$). After

reviewing the protocols, all 30 surveys were found to be usable. The final usable response rate was 48 percent.

Data Analysis

From the information provided by the Office of Planning/Institutional Research, a comparison of the cumulative grade point averages and retention rates was conducted. General demographic information was compiled by calculating the frequencies of occurrence of sex, housing, class year, majors, ethnic background, and religious affiliation for the groups combined. In addition, a split analysis of the frequency of occurrences of the sex, housing, major, ethnic background, and religious were calculated for the Pilot Program and Control Group. A mean and median analysis, as well as an independent t-test analysis was performed on the 4-point Likert-scale questions to determine if there was any significant difference between the two groups. The t-test analysis, however, was not strong enough to determine significance since the control group return rate was very small.

Results

Demographic Data

In the Fall of their sophomore year, most of the Pilot Program students were undecided regarding their majors (33%), while 21% were majoring in Communications and 26% were declared as Social Rehabilitation majors. The remaining 20% of the sample were equally split among Business, English, History, and Science. Most of the Control group (juniors at the time of the survey) were majoring in Communications (23%), Social Rehabilitation (22%), and Business (22%), with the remaining third of the sample equally split among Political Science, Economics, and Psychology.

The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the vast majority of the students in both the Pilot Program response group and the Control response group were as follows: White = 95.2% among the Pilot Program responses (pp), 88% among the Control responses (c); Hispanic=4.8%$_{pp}$, 0%$_{c}$; Pacific Islander= 0%$_{pp}$, 12%$_{c}$; Roman Catholic = 88%$_{pp}$, 85%$_{c}$; Protestant=12%$_{pp}$, 0%$_{c}$; Greek Orthodox= 0%$_{pp}$, 15%$_{c}$ (One student who returned the survey did not respond to the Ethnic Background question and six students who returned the survey did not respond to the Religious Affiliation question.). The College literature indicates that Assumption promotes Catholic living.

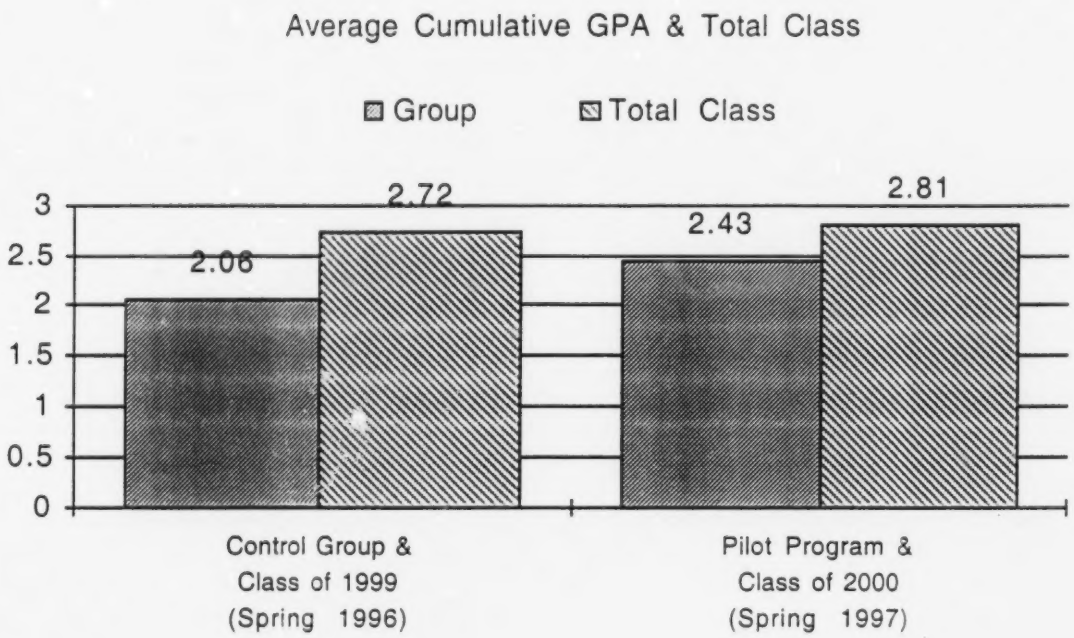
Retention Rates

The Class of 1999 (Control group's cohort) had a first year retention rate of 84 percent. The Control group itself had a first year retention rate of 74 percent. The Class of 2000 (Pilot Program's cohort) had a retention rate of percent, whereas the Pilot Program group itself had a first year retention rate of 76 percent.

Academic Achievement

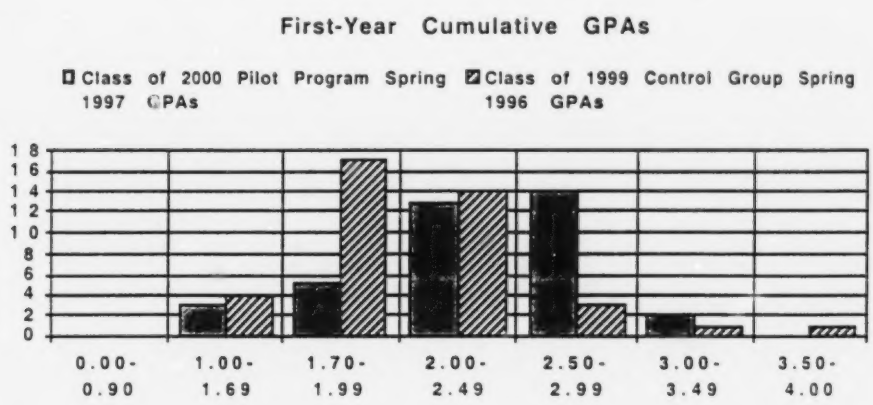
The Office of Planning/Institutional Research provided the cumulative grade point averages for the class of 1999 and the control group as well as the class of 2000 and the Pilot Program group after their first year at Assumption College. The cumulative grade point average after their first year (Spring, 1996) was 2.06 for the control group and 2.43 for the pilot program (Spring, 1997). The mean grade point average for the Class of 1999 in spring, 1996 was 2.72, and for the Class of 2000, Spring, 1997, it was 2.81. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the differences in mean grade point averages between the control group and the pilot program as well as the groups analyzed with their respective graduating year cohort.

Figure 1: Average cumulative grade point averages



In addition to obtaining the grade point averages for the two cohorts, the ranges of grade point averages for each student was also provided. Figure 2 illustrates the number of students who scored in the various cumulative grade point average ranges. It is interesting to note that the majority of the Pilot Program students (73%) scored between 2.00 and 2.99 GPA. In comparison the majority of the students (77%) in the Control Group scored between 1.70 and 2.49. These results demonstrate that the Pilot Program students were academically more stable than those in the Control Group.

Figure 2: First-year cumulative grade point averages.



Surveys

Surveys were designed to gain information from the retained students' perceptions of their first year experience. The students who experienced the Pilot Program at Assumption were first semester sophomores in the Fall of 1997. The students who were identified as Control group members were juniors at the time of the survey. It was felt to be important to solicit these students' opinions, as the key element of similarity among all of them is that they all were identified as being "academically at risk" at the time of their admission. As the demographic information demonstrates, they are also similar in ethnic group and religion, as well as representative of the whole school population in terms of proportion of male and female students. Due to the number of control group surveys available, only descriptive statistics were calculated.

>From the summary responses in Table 1, it can be seen that there are many similarities between the Control and the Pilot Program students' reports of their first year experiences at Assumption College.

TABLE 1: Survey Items and Median Responses for Control and Pilot Program Participants

		Median Response Control	Pilot Program
Overall, my first-year experience at Assumption was positive.		Agree	Agree
The Pilot Program (first-year)courses were a waste of time.		Disagree	Disagree
Faculty in general helped me grow academically.		Agree	Agree
My faculty advisor helped me to grow academically.		Disagree	Disagree
My faculty advisor helped me to grow personally.		Agree	Disagree
Faculty in general helped me grow personally.		Disagree	Agree
My first year, I became friends with students in my courses.		Agree	Agree
My first year, I became friends with students who were not in the Pilot Program (my courses).		Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
I enjoyed the social aspects of my first year.		Strongly Agree	Agree
After my first year, I knew where to find support on campus for academic problems.		Agree	Strongly
After my first year, I knew where to find support on campus for personal problems.		Agree	Strongly
I believe Assumption is the right school for me.		Strongly Agree	Agree
There is no sense of community here at Assumption.		Disagree	Disagree
Prior to entering Assumption, I felt that this was the right school for me.		Agree	Agree
My academic life is a high priority.		Agree	Strongly Agree
My social life is a high priority.		Agree	Agree
I am confident about my abilities to manage my time.		Agree	Agree
Did you spend time with friends outside of class your first year?	YES	89%	86%
	NO	11%	14%
About how much time per week?	Mean # of hours	29	5
How would you classify this time?	Mostly Academic	0%	9%
	Mostly Social	78%	5%
	50/50	11%	76%
Did you spend time with faculty outside of class?	YES	33%	67%
	NO	67%	33%
About how much time per week?	Mean # of hours	4	3
How would you classify this time?	Mostly Academic	83%	89%
	Mostly Social	0%	0%
	50/50	17%	11%
In what other activities did you participate?			
	Varsity Sports	22%	14%
	Intramural Sports	67%	38%
	Volunteer Activities	33%	19%
	Employment	11%	38%
	Student Gov't	0%	5%
	Other Clubs	44%	14%

Items asked only of Pilot Program Group

	Median Response
My faculty mentor helped me grow academically.	Agree/Disagree
My faculty mentor helped me grow personally.	Disagree
Looking back on my first year, I would voluntarily participate in the first-year Pilot Program.	Agree

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Discussion

The findings from this study bear out those of previous studies regarding increased student-faculty interaction, smaller classes, social integration and academic integration being positively associated with increases in cumulative grade point averages and increased retention rates. Although the number of control group responses to the survey was small (thus threatening the power of a t-test for group comparison purposes), the qualitative difference between the groups indicates that the Pilot Program has had a positive impact for Assumption College students who were academically at risk when they entered their first year.

Pilot Program students indicated that they knew where to find support on campus for personal and academic problems, established more friendships with other students in their courses (which helped them to find more resources to work out academic issues of concern, as well as helped to integrate them socially on campus), and spent more out of class time in a combination of social and academic pursuits with friends. The program required that they spend out of class time with faculty, and they viewed faculty in general as having helped them grow both personally and academically. They strongly agreed that academics were a high priority. These descriptions resemble the factors in the literature which have been identified as key predictors of college persistence.

The one finding of remarkable disagreement with the literature was the area of the mentor relationship. Perhaps the problem was in the way that Assumption College defined that element of the Pilot Program. Mentors were given release time of one course during the Fall semester in exchange for their role. They were informed about the goals of the program, but no training was offered as to how to develop a special relationship with their assigned students. They were to spend

outside of class time with them, and their role included assisting their students with verbal, note-taking and study skills. However, Cynthia Johnson (1989) describes mentoring quite differently:

> Mentoring involves dealing with individuals in terms of their total personality in order to advise, counsel, and/or guide them. . . a one-to-one learning relationship . . . based on modeling behavior and extended dialogue between them. Mentoring is a way of individualizing a student's education. . . . (p. 119).

The students cited their dissatisfaction with their mentor in the open-ended section of the survey. Assumption College program administrators were already aware of this aspect of the program needing improvement, and had addressed it prior to the start of the academic year in which this study was conducted. This study has added to the body of literature, which has been primarily based on research conducted within large, public universities. The current study corroborates the findings of previous research and demonstrates that the factors associated with increased retention rates and academic achievement not only apply to students in large institutions, but also to students who are already in an environment that is small with a homogeneous population.

Limitations of the Study

Although serious attempts were made to match students in the Pilot Program with students in the Control group for the same level of pre-enrollment factors (same "at risk" criteria, similarities in ethnic and religious identification), the Control group members were college juniors at the time of the study, while the Pilot Program students were sophomores. This additional year of education (and life experiences) can disrupt the survey findings in a number of ways which threaten the internal validity of the comparison of survey results. The Control group

students are older and have an additional year of college experience and developmental maturity. With one more intervening year from their first year experience, they may have been unable to distinguish what their impressions and activities two years earlier had been. There may have been some intervening historical events which affected them, which would not have affected the sophomores in the study.

Several of the survey items were not clearly identified as referring to first year impressions. The housing item may have led students to have responded as to their current housing arrangement, whereas the researchers' intentions were to gather data on their first year housing situation.

The Control group had no awareness that their performance was being studied and therefore had no particular motivation to return the surveys. The small number of returns from them throws a veil over the data collected from the surveys as it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions through comparisons with such unequal sized groups.

The administrative offices of Assumption College were also not making this study a high priority amid their normal workload at the beginning of the Fall semester. Gathering institutional data was difficult for the researchers. Had the researchers been able to obtain raw data for cumulative grade point averages, more statistical analysis would have been included in the results and perhaps some statistically significant findings could have emerged from the study.

This study viewed the first year of the existence of the Pilot Program at Assumption College. It was indeed a pilot program. After a complete cycle of the program, the administrators have already made some changes in its structure. Perhaps an additional consideration would be to separate the mentoring role from the faculty who are teaching the Pilot Program sections. This would clarify the roles

and distinguish modeling behavior from evaluation responsibilities for these particular students.

Recommendations

There needs to be an examination of the faculty mentor and faculty advisor roles in the implementation of the Pilot Program. Student open-ended responses to the survey indicated negativity and confusion about the program. The program should emphasis social as well as
academic integration.

In general the findings of our research supports other findings reported in the literature. Regarding Tinto's socialization theory, our control group was more socially integrated after their first year, and they also felt strongly that Assumption was the right school for them. It is important to tailor programs to institutional and student needs. Even though the Pilot Program members were more academically integrated, they were not happy with their assigned faculty mentors or faculty advisors. Future emphasis should focus on formalizing aspects of social integration as well as improving academic support as part of the program's goal. Beyond this it is imperative that the mentors receive training on skills necessary to support underprepared students.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study of the Pilot Program participants, to follow these students through to their graduation and beyond into their further studies and careers. To continue to fuel the evolution of the Pilot Program, the administration needs to make institutional research data more available for study.

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Appendix

Student Opinion Surveys

First-Year Experience
Student Opinion Survey

For each question, please check the space that best reflects your answer or opinion. If you would like to make any additional comments, please use the space at the end of this form. Thank you very much for your help.

Sex: ____ Male
____ Female

Housing: ____ On-Campus
____ Off-Campus

Class Year: _____

Major: _____

For the following statements please check the answer that best applies.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Overall, my first-year experience at Assumption was positive.				
2. The Pilot Program courses were a waste of time.				
3. My faculty mentor helped me grow academically.				
4. My faculty advisor helped me grow academically.				
5. Faculty in general helped me grow academically.				
6. My faculty mentor helped me grow personally.				
7. My faculty advisor helped me grow personally.				
8. Faculty in general helped me grow personally.				
9. My first year, I became friends with other students in the Pilot Program.				
10. My first year, I became friends with students who were not in the Pilot Program.				
11. I enjoyed the social aspects of my first year.				
12. I know where to find support on campus for academic problems.				
13. I know where to find support on campus for personal problems.				
14. I am confident about my abilities to manage my time.				
15. I believe Assumption is the right school for me.				
16. There is no sense of community here at Assumption.				
17. Prior to entering Assumption, I felt this was the right school for me.				
18. My academic life is a high priority.				
19 My social life is a high priority.				
20. Looking back on my first year, I would voluntarily participate in the first-year Pilot Program.				

MORE QUESTIONS ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE!

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21. a) Did you spend time with friends from the Pilot Program outside of class? _____ Yes _____ No

b) If yes, about how much time per week? _____

c) How would you classify this time spent with your Pilot Program friends?

_____ Mostly academic _____ Mostly social _____ About 50/50 Social and Academic

22. a) Did you spend time with faculty from the Pilot Program outside of class? _____ Yes _____ No

b) If yes, about how much time per week? _____

c) How would you classify this time spent with your Pilot Program faculty?

_____ Mostly academic _____ Mostly social _____ About 50/50 Social and Academic

23. In what other activities did you participate? (check all that apply)

_____ Varsity Sports _____ Employment

_____ Intramural Sports _____ Student Government

_____ Volunteer Activities _____ Other Clubs

24. In your opinion, what were the best parts of the Pilot Program?

25. What parts of the Pilot Program do you think need improvement?

26. Please comment on your overall first-year experience.

27. Other comments.

Ethnic Background:

_____ American Indian
_____ African-American
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Hispanic/Latino(a)
_____ White
_____ Cape Verdean
_____ Foreign
_____ Other _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

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OCTOBER 27

THANK YOU!

☺

First-Year Experience
Student Opinion Survey

For each question, please check the space that best reflects your answer or opinion. If you would like to make any additional comments, please use the space at the end of this form. Thank you very much for your help.

Sex: ____ Male
____ Female

Housing: ____ On-Campus
____ Off-Campus

Class Year: _____

Major: _____

For the following statements please check the answer that best applies.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Overall, my first-year experience at Assumption was positive.				
2. My first-year courses were a waste of time.				
3. My first-year faculty advisor helped me grow academically.				
4. My first-year faculty advisor helped me grow personally.				
5. Faculty in general helped me grow academically my first year.				
6. Faculty in general helped me grow personally my first year.				
7. My first year, I became friends with students in my courses.				
8. My first year, I became friends with students who were not in my courses.				
9. I enjoyed the social aspects of my first year.				
10. After my first year, I knew where to find support on campus for academic problems.				
11. After my first year, I knew where to find support on campus for personal problems.				
12. I am confident about my abilities to manage my time.				
13. I believe Assumption is the right school for me.				
14. There is no sense of community here at Assumption.				
15. Prior to entering Assumption, I felt this was the right school for me.				
16. My academic life is a high priority.				
17 My social life is a high priority.				

MORE QUESTIONS ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE!

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18. a) Did you spend time with friends outside of class your first year? _____ Yes _____ No

b) If yes, about how much time per week?_____

c) How would you classify this time spent with your friends?

_____ Mostly academic _____ Mostly social _____ About 50/50 Social and Academic

19. a) Did you spend time with faculty outside of class your first year? _____ Yes _____ No

b) If yes, about how much time per week?_____

c) How would you classify this time spent with faculty?

_____ Mostly academic _____ Mostly social _____ About 50/50 Social and Academic

20. In what other activities did you participate in your first year? (check all that apply)

_____ Varsity Sports _____ Employment

_____ Intramural Sports _____ Student Government

_____ Volunteer Activities _____ Other Clubs

21. In your opinion, what were the best parts of your first-year at Assumption?

22. What would have helped you to make the transition from high school to college life?

23. Please comment on your overall first-year experience.

24. Other comments.

Ethnic Background:

_____ American Indian
_____ African-American
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Hispanic/Latino(a)
_____ White
_____ Cape Verdean
_____ Foreign
_____ Other _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

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